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SISTER SARAH



SARAH WILLIAMS HUNTINGTON
"SISTER SARAH"



1837—1917

Washington, D.C. St. John's parish, Church of the Holy Trinity

SARAH WILLIAMS HUNTINGTON

“SISTER SARAH”



A TRIBUTE PREPARED BY DIRECTION OF

TRUSTEES OF ST. JOHN'S CHURCH ORPHANAGE

OF WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



WASHINGTON
BERESFORD, PRINTER
1913

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ST. JOHN'S CHURCH ORPHANAGE.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES—1882.

The Right Reverend William Pinkney; Reverend William A. Leonard; Montgomery Blair; Wm. H. Emory, U. S. A.; Robert Reyburn, M. D.; Frank W. Hackett; Thomas Hyde; Chauncey McKeever, U. S. A.; F. M. Gunnell, U. S. N.; George D. Ruggles, U. S. A.; Alexander Bliss; A. Ross Ray; Charles H. Crane, U. S. N.; Gustavus V. Fox.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES—1918.

The Right Reverend Alfred Harding; Reverend Roland Cotton Smith; Frank W. Hackett; Nicholas Luquer; Charles H. Stockton; Hennen Jennings; N. L. Burchell; Chauncey Hackett; Walter R. Tuckerman, Ralph C. Johnson.

From the Records of the Board of Trustees.

At the annual meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Church Orphanage Association, February 1, 1917, on motion of Rear Admiral Stockton, Mr. Frank W. Hackett was appointed a committee of one, to draw a proper minute on the death of Sister Sarah.

WALTER R. TUCKERMAN,
Secretary.

From the REVEREND DOCTOR ROLAND COTTON SMITH,
Rector of St. John's Church.

In the following pages there have been collected, and put into permanent form, tributes that were paid, at the time of her death, to a spiritual genius, known by every one as "Sister Sarah." She was a remarkable example of how the Spirit can work with power in a human life.

We often build an institution, and then look about for a personality to fill it. Sister Sarah started with her personality. She drew a few motherless and fatherless children about her, and by the irresistible force of a cheerful, joyful, self-sacrificing service, she attracted the attention of men and women who, in their turn, built a roof over her personality, and gave to her spirit a local habitation and a name—the most consistently Christian institution that I know of—St. John's Orphanage.

Sister Sarah had one consuming passion, to love and care for as many children as could possibly be brought under one roof. All red tape was set aside; rules were often broken. If there was not room in the beds she would put the children under the beds, so long as she could love and help them.

She demonstrated, every day, the power of spirit over matter. She knew little about the modern ideas of the laws of health, and often defied them, and her children were the healthiest in Washington. She knew less about the modern ideas of efficiency, and yet her economies were the despair and admiration of Efficiency Boards.

She took whatever tools she found at hand, no matter how poor they may have been, and glorified and made them effective by her undaunted spirit. She made an Institution a Home.

Her dress of a "Sister," which sometimes becomes the symbol of a narrow and restricted life, became with her the symbol of a broad and generous catholicity, as she drew in the name of her Christ, into the folds of her garment, the little children who rise up today, with all the people who ever knew her, to bless the name of "Sister Sarah."

SISTER SARAH.

"Blessed, blessed they
 The merciful, whose ears
 Are swift to hear the crying of distress;
 Soft as the rain in summer fall their tears;
 Their place is found beside the fatherless.
 Yea,
 Blessed they
 To whom the outcast and the poor complain
 Not in vain;
 Mercies numberless
 They hereafter shall obtain."

Harriet McEwen Kimball.

On Thursday, January 25, 1917, entered into rest at the St. John's Orphanage Building, on F and Twentieth Streets, Northwest, Sarah Williams Huntington, known to children whom she had blest, and to the people of Washington, as "Sister Sarah." Had her life been spared for five months longer, she would have reached the age of eighty years.

Sister Sarah was born in Brunswick, Ohio, 27th June, 1837, the daughter of Joseph Hyde and Eleanor (Foster) Huntington, of Norwich, Connecticut. Her father and mother lived in Norwich; but at the time of her birth, for reasons of business, they had been staying for two or three years in Ohio. Mr. Huntington was a descendant of Simon Huntington, of Norwich, the ancestor of many prominent rectors of the Protestant Episcopal Church in this country.

The school days and the early life of Sister Sarah were passed in Norwich. She was confirmed there in Trinity Church, on Easter Eve, April 3, 1858, by the Right Reverend John Williams, Bishop of Connecticut. The Rector

of Trinity at that time was the Reverend Benjamin H. Paddock, afterwards Bishop of Massachusetts. It is an interesting fact that, from 1862 to 1865, the Reverend John Vaughan Lewis (who later came to St. John's Washington,) was Rector of Trinity Church, Norwich. He had thus made the acquaintance of Sarah Huntington, and had noted some of the striking features of her character.

In 1867 the home at Norwich was broken up by the death of her father and mother. For the next few years Sister Sarah spent some of her time in visiting and in travelling. She lived with a brother at Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1869, she journeyed to the Pacific Coast, and thence sailed to Honolulu. Sometime in 1871, upon the invitation of Dr. John Vaughan Lewis, Miss Huntington came to Washington, for the purpose of beginning upon work that culminated in the establishment of St. John's Orphanage. Soon after her arrival she entered the Sisterhood, and took the name of "Sister Sarah." She rented a house, formerly owned and occupied by Surgeon-General Lawson, of the Army, numbered 525, on Twentieth Street, at the corner of F Northwest—a large, old-fashioned, brick house, with plenty of ground in front. Here Sister Sarah gathered around her half-a-dozen little children, and cared for them at her own expense.

When the Reverend William A. Leonard had begun his duties at Washington, as Rector of St. John's, he recognized the capability of Sister Sarah to take charge of an institution for the care of orphan children. Such an institution he had founded in Brooklyn, while Rector there of the Church of the Redeemer. In April, 1882, with characteristic energy and sound judgment, Dr. Leonard brought together in

the small vestry-room of St. John's (the door of which opened on H Street), a few of his parishioners, who, with the Rector as Warden of the Board of Trustees, and Mr. Thomas Hyde, of Georgetown, as Treasurer, organized the present Church Orphanage Association of St. John's Parish. Sister Sarah was placed in charge.

From that day to the present time St. John's Orphanage has enjoyed a steady and healthy growth. The wonderful degree of success that has attended the development of this beneficent institution has been entirely due to the skill and the devotion of this noble woman. The Trustees are impelled to spread upon the record a memorial of the service rendered by Sister Sarah. It is no more than the simple truth to declare that all through these many years Sister Sarah had herself been "The Orphanage." In her there were united what is rarely to be witnessed, the gentle grace of a cultivated woman and the keen insight of a person accustomed to deal from day to day with the problem of expending a dollar to the best advantage.

Surely a debt of gratitude is due from the people of Washington to the memory of Sister Sarah. Of a saintly character, she had for almost half a century quietly but most efficiently been promoting the public welfare. With diligence she had applied herself to a work that made for lasting good in this community. Sister Sarah, during a period of five and forty years, consecrated each waking hour to the task of taking little children from miserable surroundings and giving to them a home—nurturing them into boys and girls, who grew up to be men and women, happy and respected.

This gracious task she accomplished single-handed. A

full narrative of obstacles overcome, and of results achieved, would appear almost incredible, so great has been the number of those little ones brought by her ministrations out from squalor into sunshine. Not merely was it that here and there a precious life had been rescued, but year after year scores, and even hundreds, of children had looked to her and found in her encouraging smile how sacred is a mother's love. Above all, Sister Sarah was at pains to instil into the mind of each tender charge some knowledge of those religious principles that were to make them in very truth good men or good women. There occurred, we feel warranted in saying, not a single instance of failure in this goodly process of transformation.

The financial resources of the Orphanage, it is no harm to confess, have uniformly been slender enough, notwithstanding the liberal spirit manifested for its welfare by the people of St. John's Parish. How the head of the Institution managed all along to extend her labors into a field far beyond that officially provided for, is a problem that takes on an air of mystery. Sister Sarah met many an expenditure somehow—and that is all that the Trustees knew about it. One thing is certain,—whoever put money into her hands knew perfectly well that it would be economically used, in doing a great deal of good. It would be an act of remissness were no mention here made of the skilful administration of the household thus happily presided over.

The secret of Sister Sarah's success lay in the fact that in a high degree hers was a refined and a loving nature; and yet there was in it no element of weakness. While exercising a wise foresight, she went her way ever with firmness and with perfect courage. In a word, Sister Sarah was a born leader.

It used frequently to be said that St. John's Orphanage was not an institution,—it was a home. The word “home” aptly described it. Each little boy or girl there looked up to a mother. So abundant was that mother's love that every child enjoyed a generous share. Moreover, Sister Sarah's watchful eye kept her family of children ever in good health. The little ones thrived in the sunshine of her joyous nature. It was a treat for the visitor at the Orphanage to look upon a group clustering around Sister Sarah. Year after year, keenly discerning what was suitable for this habitude or for that, she carried forward the work of training each and every child. With excellent judgment, she looked around and found safe and befitting places for such as had become of an age no longer needing shelter under the Orphanage roof. The wonder is that Sister Sarah could herself attend to each individual case—but she did.

In 1907 it was gratefully observed of her :

“During the past twenty-five years upwards of one thousand children have passed under her loving care to become happy and worthy men and women, and remaining earnest children of the Church which Sister Sarah's loving motherhood so well represents.”

What has here been said pictures but inadequately the devotion to duty, crowned with success, that uniformly characterized the lifework of this truly remarkable woman. To the annual reports of the Orphanage Sister Sarah was accustomed to furnish a brief account of what had happened under her immediate supervision during the previous twelve-month. The story she told was simple, yet im-

pressive. One perceived that there was going on in this home a constant building up of character in boy or girl, a development of the better side of human nature, a practical demonstration of the real meaning of Christianity—and this, too, under the guidance of one who seemed as if divinely appointed to carry on the work. It was a triumph of charity.

The following extract from one of Sister Sarah's reports tells us (were there need to tell) why her name will ever be treasured as of blessed memory:

We might mention here another case, a most unpromising little waif, brought many years ago by the police, whom we feared to receive lest she should do more harm than receive good. The mother in jail, the most degraded of her class, what could be hoped for the child? But she seemed gradually to forget her old habits, became industrious and useful. At a suitable age she left us for a position which she filled most acceptably, spending her holidays at the Orphanage; now the happy wife of an estimable farmer in her own comfortable home. We shudder to think where the little elf might have drifted, had no one held out to her a helping hand.

Words fail to express how grateful are the Trustees of St. John's Orphanage for the deeds wrought by this good woman—for the example she has left. Who can measure the influence of that long, unbroken stretch of service—loving and self-forgetful? Ours is a reasonable hope that the story of what Sister Sarah has accomplished will prove to be an inspiration to more than one kindly soul, who shall learn of it in years yet to come.

Says her brother, C. L. F. Huntington, writing from Toledo, Ohio, 17th of March, 1917:

If there be any virtue in heredity, Sister Sarah comes naturally by her disposition to render faithful and sacrificing service to the Church, for she came from a Church loving ancestry. On her paternal side she descended from the Puritan ancestor, Simon Huntington, of Norwich, Connecticut, which family has given to the Church many noted Rectors.

From the Rev. John Lathrop, who for conscientious scruples, resigned his office in the Church of England, and became Pastor of the First Independent Church of London, and who later, with the greater part of his congregation, was arrested and confined in Newgate prison, in 1632, for two years. When released, he sailed, in 1634, for America. The Huntington family is closely allied with the Leffingwell, Tracy, and Hyde families.

On her maternal side (Foster) she traced her ancestry to Anacher Great Forester, of Flanders, d. 837; to Lieut. Francis Peabody, and Mary Foster, daughter of Reginald Foster, whose family is honorably mentioned in Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*; also, in *Marmion*.

George Peabody, the Philanthropist, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Mrs. Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Mrs. Horace Mann were of the same family.

Another ancestor was Bishop Richard Poore, founder of the present Salisbury Cathedral.

In 1869, Sister Sarah made a trip to the Pacific Coast. From there she went to Honolulu, returning by sea, crossing the Isthmus, and so to New York. During this period Rev. John Vaughan Lewis had been called to St. John's,

Washington. Seeking some one to take charge of an Orphanage, and knowing her capability, he corresponded with her, and solicited her to visit Washington with this in view. This she did. In 1871 or 1872 she entered the Sisterhood and gradually assumed charge of St. John's Orphanage, where she continued until her death January 25, 1917."

In order better to fit herself for her work, she made a trip to Europe in 1878, visiting the Sisters of St. Margaret, at East Grinstead, near London, and their Orphanages. On the Continent, she was especially interested in Pastor Theodor Fleidner's Training School for Protestant Sisters of Charity, located at Kaiserwerth, on the Rhine, near Dusseldorf.

*From BISHOP LEONARD, of Ohio, formerly Rector of
St. John's, Washington.*

It is almost impossible to add anything to the beautiful tribute paid to Sister Sarah by the Trustees, at the hand of Mr. Hackett.

My testimony is to the fact that, after a long period of years of experience, I have rarely, if ever, met a character such as hers. The combination of sanctity, utter and absolute self-sacrifice, and devotion; together with remarkable good sense and practicality, and also with the mothering instinct largely developed; the patience and the active persistence of her daily living in the midst of her large household, made her one of the most popular personalities that it has been my privilege to know. Not only in the Church, but in the Capital city, was she conspicuous as a benefactor; and yet her modesty and self-effacement would never permit any special recognition of her qualities.

It was a joy to be associated with her in the venerable St. John's Parish; and in these years since, I have counselled and advised with her as to intelligent methods for doing Christ's service among little children. Many are they who will "rise up and call her blessed;" and great will be the joy of her reunion with the souls she has comforted and helped to save. May the Lord give her perpetual light and an eternal reward.

Eastertide, 1917.

WILLIAM A. LEONARD.

RESOLUTIONS OF THE LADIES' AID.

On the 30th January, 1917, the following resolutions, presented by Mrs. Arthur Brice, were unanimously passed by the Board of the Ladies' Aid of St. John's Church Orphanage:

Whereas, SISTER SARAH, for many years the faithful and loving Mother of St. John's Church Orphanage, departed this life on Thursday, January 25, 1917, at four o'clock P. M., at the Orphanage, surrounded by those she loved best, and we trust and believe, without pain, and in full faith of a glorious immortality.

We, the Ladies' Aid of the Orphanage, desire to place on record an expression of our profound sorrow for the loss of one so much beloved for her noble life and unselfish devotion to God's little innocents; and for the beautiful example she has set to all who would strive to do the Master's will.

Gifted with unusual intelligence and endowed with the bright spirit of youth, Sister Sarah was early called upon to decide what her mission in life should be. She possessed to an unusual degree a mind and heart which would have made her a prominent figure in any place of life, and whatever her choice might have been, we now realize the result and full value of her decision.

More than forty years ago, the Orphanage was begun in a small way by Sister Sarah; and in all these years she struggled with many adversities, giving of her private means, and the full measure of her life, to the care, teaching and nurture of the children committed to her keeping.

By her strength of character, tact and good judgment, and above all by her mother-love, the institution has enjoyed an unusual career, and remains a living testimonial to her life of love and devotion.

Unbiassed by creed or sect, the brightness of her life shone in every direction, and she enjoyed at all times the respect and gratitude of those of every faith in this community.

Like a valiant soldier, she fought and overcame the obstacles which came in her path of duty, and with faith and undaunted courage, found the way to provide relief.

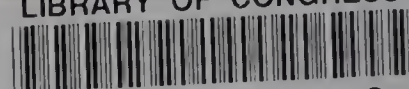
We can but feebly express our gratitude for the lifework of this noble Christian woman; and it is not too much to say that coming generations will learn to revere and respect her memory; for she grafted into the hearts and minds of her children that love of truth, honor and right living which will be reflected in their offspring.

She has reared and sent out into the world good men and women, who are living wholesome and useful lives, fortified and endowed with the spirit of her Christian teaching; and of whom she was ever wont to say—

“Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
 Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
 The short and simple annals of the poor.”

True Copy: Attest: SARAH TILGHMAN EMORY,
Secretary Ladies' Aid.

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